

New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse

1-800-367-6274 or 973-989-1122 * 375 E. McFarlan St., Dover, NJ 07801 * www.njgroups.org

SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCATING A MEETING SPACE

"If they're anything, support groups are low maintenance. They don't require a lot of equipment, or complicated setups, or specially-designed facilities. Basically they call for a bit of quiet, a bit of privacy, and a few people who are ready to say something meaningful to one another. Consequently, support groups can function fairly well in a variety of places."

- James E. Miller, in his book, Effective Support Groups, p. 23.

The most obvious place to have a small meeting, especially a first meeting of your core group, is in someone's home. If you expect more people than such a space can hold, or if you personally prefer not to open your home to people who are (initially) strangers, consider the possibilities listed below:

- *Churches & synagogues* are the most common public meeting place for self-help groups, and they seem to be the most cooperative. In requesting space, a personal connection is the best (know anyone who is a member?), and that could mean no charge initially - so work through personal contacts you or your core group may have (the pastor or rabbi). Otherwise, just phone local churches. More and more churches have been requiring a minimal donation to go towards heating and utilities costs they must pay.
- *Hospitals* are another option, especially if your group is health related. An advantage is that hospital space is usually free, but for this reason space on a regular basis is in short supply. Begin by contacting the administrative office or the community relations department to request a meeting space.
- *Community organizations or agencies* such as community centers, counseling centers, YMCA/YWCA, Red Cross, Salvation Army, veteran organizations, senior citizen centers, and others will sometimes provide space free of charge for self-help group meetings. While you would have to end your meeting well before their closing time, some local public libraries are being used by groups. Other sites might be daycare centers and schools, bank, municipal town hall or community college. Again, if anyone in your initial group personally knows a staff member or officer, it helps. Determine where other support groups hold their meetings.
- *Public diners, coffee houses, and even food courts in a local shopping mall* are used by some small groups. These sites mean that refreshments, and even a meal out, are readily available to those who need them.

Availability of a kitchen or a sink with running water is desirable for making coffee or other refreshments. It is helpful to place the chairs in a circle or around a table. In this way, members may face each other and the atmosphere is friendlier and more supportive. A table can serve to display books, pamphlets, announcements and other printed materials. A small storage space can also be helpful for storing supplies, etc., if one could be made available.

When inquiring about a meeting place, be sure to communicate the fact that your group is a voluntary, non-profit organization that intends to provide a service to the public free of charge. Be clear on the specific nights that you would like your meetings to take place, how long they will be, and who will be responsible for opening and closing the facility. Such attention to detail will serve you and your group well.

Do you have another good idea for free or inexpensive meeting spaces? Please let us know at info@selfhelpgroups.org.